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# *Human trafficking in Mindanao*

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*personal narratives and local perspectives*

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

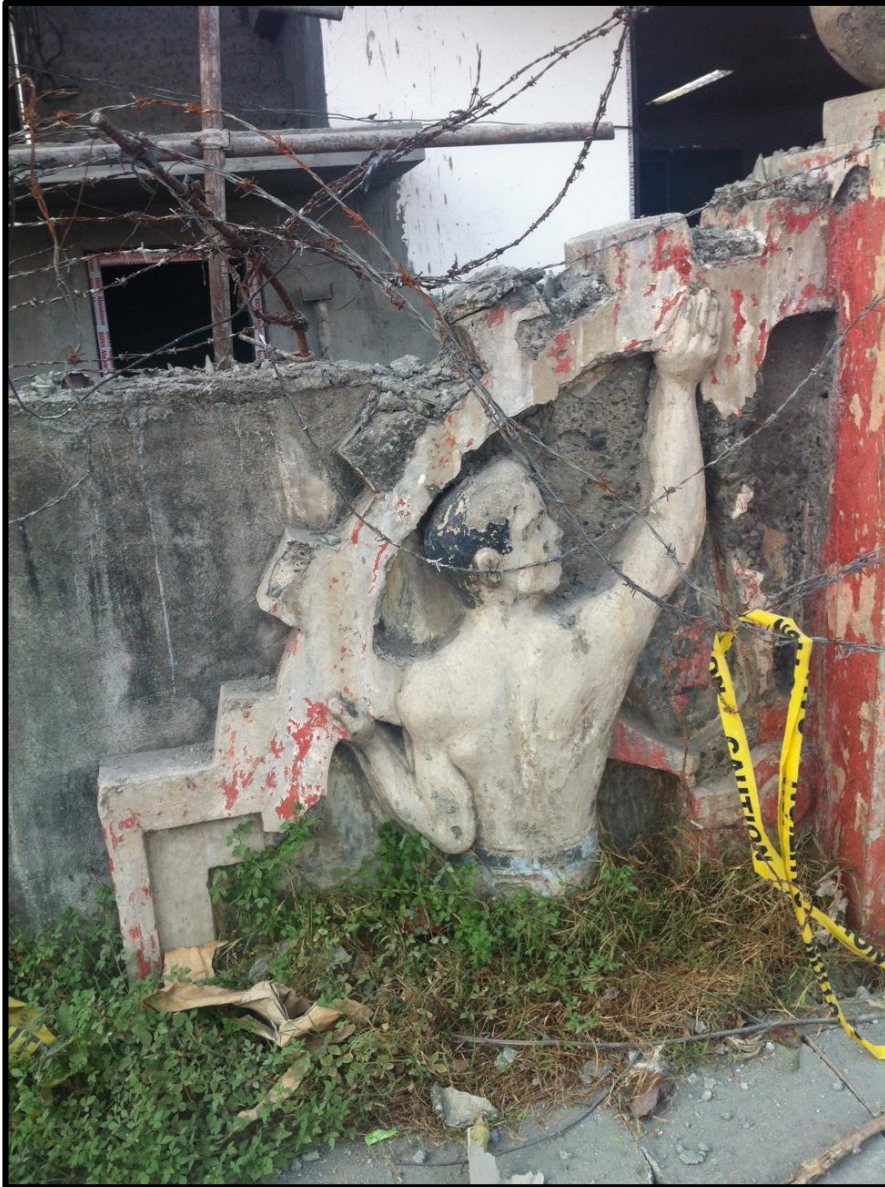
in

Social Anthropology

at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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*Figure 1: Crumbling sculpture in Davao City*

## Abstract

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Academic as well as popular attention to human trafficking has increased dramatically in recent years, while the demands for immediate action have meant that counter-measures, from political legislation to direct intervention, have often preceded research-based insights. Researchers have demonstrated the value of close research in understanding this phenomenon. However, such in-depth local research is still an emerging area, and little work has been done on the Philippines specifically. In Mindanao, known issues include various forms of labour trafficking, sex trafficking, underage soldiers, and trafficking of migrants. Human trafficking in Mindanao is a complex problem, both in terms of the multiple forms of trafficking that occur and the Philippines' unique social setting. The purpose of this research has been to explore how human trafficking in Mindanao relates to wider social processes. I lived in Eastern Mindanao for five months of fieldwork, from December 2015 to May 2016. During this time, I talked with and interviewed people who had experienced exploitative labour, human trafficking, or trafficking-like practices, whose life stories are at the centre of this research. I also spoke with government and NGO workers from anti-trafficking and related agencies who provided insights into trafficking and local conditions, as well as relevant community members such as former migrants and sexual labourers. In this thesis, my original contribution to knowledge is an exploration and analysis of the social context which influences human trafficking in Mindanao, based on first-person accounts which are contextualised in the wider society and theoretically analysed through a framework of structural, symbolic, and compounding violence. Drawing on anthropological approaches to violence, I have considered human trafficking as a form of violence in the context of multiple violences. Within this framework I also present the idea of compounding violence as a lens to explore and conceptualise the ways that violence often leads to further violence. My findings suggest that human trafficking in Mindanao is an outcome and extension of local social conditions, not separate to normal social processes and realities, and one manifestation of wider compounding structural violence. At the same time, I argue that the narratives from those who have experienced trafficking also reveal deep and complex cultural, social, and personal expressions of meaning, resilience, and hope within constrained, unequal, and even violent circumstances.

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## Abbreviations and definitions of terms

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AMOSUP	Associated Marine Officers and Seamen’s Union of the Philippines
ALS	Alternative Learning System (High School Equivalency)
BLES	Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics (Philippines)
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CSEC	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
GO/NGO	Government Organisation/Non-Government Organisation
GRO	Guest relations officer; euphemism for club-based sexual labourers
IACAT	Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ILO	International Labour Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MILF	Moro Independence Liberation Front
NPA	New People’s Army
OFW	Overseas Filipino Worker
OWWA	Overseas Workers Welfare Association
₱	Philippine Peso (PHP)
POEA	Philippines Overseas Employment Administration
PSA	Philippines Statistics Authority
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
TIP Report	Trafficking in Persons Report (US State Department)
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
VAW/C	Violence Against Women and Children

Ako, ko	Me or I, short form 'ko'
Amerikano	American
Apo	Grandchild
Ate	Older sister
Bago	New
Bagong bayani	Modern-day hero (Bago - new + bayani - hero)
Balay	House
Barangay	Municipal division
Bayad / walay bayad	Payment / no payment
Bayani	Hero
Bukado	Avocado
Cebuano	Language of the Southern Philippines
CR (Comfort room)	Toilet (Lavatory)
Copra	Dried coconut meat
Daghan	Many
Daog-daog	(To) oppress/Oppressed
Davao	Capital city of Mindanao
Dili	No or not
Dili maayo	Bad (literally, not good; there is no word for "bad" alone)
Diri / diha / didto	Here / there (near) / “over there” (far)
Estudyante	student
Filibustero (from Spanish)	Pirate or subverter; in the Philippines, implies inciting sedition
Filipino/Filipina	Person or man from the Philippines/woman from the Philippines
Gago(ng)	Stupid, silly, idiot
Ikaw, ka	You, short form 'ka'
Ispatay pangpang	Killer (pangpang) cliff (ispatay)
Jeepney	Specific local transport, small bus

Kaayo	Very
Kamote	Kumara/sweet potato
Karenderiya	Small restaurant
"Ka sarili mong bulsa"	"Out of your own pocket"
Katabang	Helper; generally a domestic helper
Katsila	Spanish
Kaya/Dili kaya	Can or able/cannot or unable
Keso	Cheese
Kulata	(To) beat with great violence
Kuya	Older brother
Lang	Only
Lola	Grandmother
Lisod / lisod gyud	Difficult/very difficult
Lumad	Indigenous rural people
Maayo	Good or well
Maayong Buntag	Good morning
Udto	Noon or lunchtime
Hapon	Afternoon
Gabii	Evening
Maestro/a	Teacher (male/female)
Malunggay	Moringa (edible plant "superfood")
Mama-san	Female manager of sexual labourers
Matarong pamatasan	Ethics, correct or moral behaviour
Mindanao	Southern region of the Philippines
Mga	Plural (added before the word)
(Mga) Numero:	Numbers:
usa, duha, tulo, upat, lima...	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
uno, dos, tres, kuwatro, singko...	For some situations the Spanish-derived numbers are used

Pancit	Noodles
Salamat	Thank you
(Daghang salamat/ Salamat kaayo)	(Many thanks / thank you very much)
“Sa kadtong mga tao nga akong nautang ang kinabuhi nila”	"Those people whose lives are my debt"
Sakripisyo	Sacrifice; Suffering
Sundanon	Prolific
Suroy-suroy	(To) roam or wander
Tindahan	Small shop
Trisikad, sikad	Tricycle, short form; pedicab/rickshaw, motorised or pedal powered
(mga) Tsinelas, slippers	Jandals (inexpensive, plastic thong-style sandals)
Utang	Debt
Visayas	Central region of the Philippines, north of Mindanao
“Wala ka kahibalo unsay mahitabo”	“You don’t know what will happen”
Zamboanga	City in south-west Mindanao, common transit point to Malaysia

## Images and tables

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